



Five Suggestions for the Initial Meeting

Here are a few suggestions for what to do during your initial meeting at the school. The focus of the initial meeting should be on learning about the school environment, observing how foodservice works, and beginning to build relationships with key players in the school.

1. **Tour the school.** Have the principal, administrator, or other school official take you on a full tour of the school. As you walk through the school, observe the students, the layouts of classrooms, public areas with competitive foods such as vending machines and the school store, and displays and messaging that could reflect the school's culture and current activities.
2. **Tour the cafeteria.** During your tour, observe the types of equipment available in the kitchen. Is there storage for fresh ingredients? What kind of staffing is in place in the kitchen? What is the dining area like? Are nutrition or health messages or visuals displayed?
3. **Observe a foodservice and visit with the students.** Take note of the options available to students. What is the current menu being served? Does it include whole grains, dark green or orange vegetables, and dry beans and peas? How does it look, smell and taste? Are the students eating and enjoying the meal? Do the students have enough time to eat? Do they arrive in large groups or at staggered intervals? How long are the waiting lines to get food? How are menu items presented and displayed? Is there enough space for the kids to sit?
4. **Eat with the foodservice director and staff.** Learn about the food service operations. Does the school run its own foodservice, work with a central kitchen, or have a contract foodservice provider? Ask them to explain what qualifies as a reimbursable meal. What kind of relationship do the foodservice personnel have with the school and with the children? Ask them their ideas and what, if anything, they would like to see changed. What challenges do they face? What ideas do they have where a chef can help? What do they hope to get out of this partnership?
5. **Discuss next steps with the principal or administrator.** Ask about what is working well in the school and what they envision are the goals of this partnership. Brainstorm a few ideas for collaboration. What goals does the school have for improved health and wellness? What are the objectives of the Wellness Committee, and what wellness policies are in place? Also, find out what regulations are in place for volunteers working in school kitchens and with children.

It is important that chefs enter schools with care, just as they would enter a stranger's home. They must be extremely sensitive to the feelings and viewpoints of everyone. It is critical to make everyone feel proud to be a part of the process. Find out what good things are happening around the school, and build upon them. The bottom line is, find something good and help make it great.